



For Immediate Release: April 21, 2022

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NEW LIBRARY DIRECTOR ANNOUNCES FINE FREE DETAILS

Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz Expected to Participate

The Buffalo & Erie County Public Libraries are excited to announce the elimination of overdue fines to ensure equitable access to library resources to all residents of Erie County. Overdue fines create a barrier to library access - when patrons are unable to pay fines, they are less likely to visit the library. The fine free initiative will allow more residents the ability to experience and enjoy everything our 37 libraries and two bookmobiles have to offer.

To kick off a fine free future, every library cardholder will notice their account has been cleared of past overdue fines and hold fees.

The value of increased access to library resources for the residents of Erie County outweighs the loss of revenue, which historically represents only a small portion of the Library's annual budget. Fine revenue is a diminishing source of revenue, partly due to the increase in circulation of digital content, which does not accrue overdue fines. In 2022, the Library will use savings from 2021, and will increase fundraising, to offset the loss.

A media event was held this afternoon immediately following the Library System Board of Trustees meeting where two fine free-related resolutions were approved to finalize changes to the System-wide circulation policy and modify the Library's 2022 budget.

Library Board Chair Kimberly Johnson welcomed guests including Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz and the new Library Director John Spears.

For additional details, click her: <https://www.buffalolib.org/borrower-information/fine-free>. Fine free Q & A is attached.

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**REDUCING BARRIERS TO INFORMATION STRENGTHENS OUR COMMUNITY...
AND THAT BENEFITS EVERYONE!**

Fine Free FAQs (Frequently Asked QUESTIONS)

- *Do I still have to pay charges that are on my account prior to libraries going fine free?*
If you have returned all materials, fines have been removed from your account. Charges for lost or damaged materials and other miscellaneous charges will remain.
- *What fines are being waived?* Fines/fees for all patrons at all libraries with the following reasons:
 - Daily late (overdue) charges
 - Hold charges for requested materials
 - Unclaimed hold charges for requested material not picked up
 - Lost library card charges
- *Why do I still have a balance on my account?*
While the Library is waiving most charges, those for lost or damaged materials and other miscellaneous charges will remain.
- *How will the Library get people to return borrowed materials?*
"No fines" does not mean "no responsibility." Materials will still have due dates and patrons are expected to return materials on time. Other libraries who have removed overdue fines have reported no significant impact on material return rates. **Additionally, materials that are 21 days (change from 35 days) overdue are assumed lost and patrons will be charged for replacement and processing costs.**
- *When are patron accounts BLOCKED?*
Patron accounts will be blocked when they reach \$50.01 in charges and/or when 15 or more items become overdue.
- *Will I still receive reminders about returning materials?*
Yes, via email or phone, based on your preferred method of contact.
The Library will now be implementing three (3) autorenewals for eligible items:
 - The Library will send an email/phone message to indicate whether a renewal has been successful or has failed. Failed renewals mean that the 3 time renewal limit has been reached and/or the material has a waiting list and cannot be renewed.
 - Items will be renewed from due date rather than date of renewal.
 - Patrons can renew items (by phone, online, etc.) **ONLY** within 2 days of due date.
 - Staff can continue to renew items for patrons anytime.

- *What library charges remain?*
Charges for library services and products such as copying, printing, material replacement costs, and other miscellaneous charges remain.
- *I've always thought of paying my fines as my donation to the Library. Can I still donate?*
Yes! Now and in the future, donations to the Library can be made through the [Buffalo & Erie County Public Library website](#). Donations will support critical Library programs and services.
- *Why now?*
In recent years, Library System Administration has studied fine free programs already in place in other parts of the state and country. A major study of the practice was done by the San Francisco Public Library in 2019 where they found the rate of late return was equal across all populations they served, but those in low-income neighborhoods were more likely to have their accounts blocked due to overdue fines. They also conducted interviews and assessments of libraries who had already implemented fine free policies and ultimately decided to eliminate all overdue fees in their library system.

Library Journal has conducted multiple surveys to assess trends in fine removal and published often on the subject. The Urban Libraries Council now estimates there are 500 libraries in North American that have gone fine free.

Based on this research, interviews with colleagues from other libraries, and an analysis of our financial and circulation statistics, the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library System Board of Trustees plans to vote to eliminate late fines at their April 21, 2022 board meeting.

We hope to encourage patrons to return to using local libraries while simultaneously attracting new users to benefit from the outstanding print and digital collections, onsite and virtual programming and training, public computers and WiFi - as well as the all-ages informational resources.

Link to [Library Locations](#) <https://www.buffalolib.org/locations-and-hours/branch-locator>

Suggested reading

The Atlantic, December 4, 2020 "Why Some Libraries Are Ending Fines" by [Deborah Fallows](#), <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/12/why-some-libraries-are-ending-fines/621445/>

Fine free Library Map, Urban Libraries Council website <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/resources/fine-free-map>

Why Have Libraries Gone Fine-free The Past Few Years?, American Library Association Blog <https://www.oif.ala.org/oif/why-have-libraries-gone-fine-free-the-past-few-years/>

NY Public Library Announces Fine Free, October 2021 <https://www.nypl.org/spotlight/fines>